



Sternenstaub und Seelenvogel Animationsfilm zu Analytic Theology: A Review by [Douglas R McGaughey](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#).

„Sternenstaub und Seelenvogel“  
Animationsfilm zu Analytic Theology: A Review  
Film Available at <https://www.analytic-theology.de/devweb.mwn.de/>  
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### Abstract

A review of the Animation Film in Analytic Theology, "Sternenstaub und Seelenvogel" ("Stardust and Soul Bird"), from the University of Augsburg, the Catholic Facults of the University of Innsbruck, the Munich School of Philosophy, the University of Regensburg, and the School of Philosophical Theology of St. George (Frankfurt a.M.).

The film itself is a very clever work of art that combines animism and natural scenes. The medium is the message, clearly! Humans are the “animated” presence in an, otherwise, merely “natural” and “meaningless” world.

In my humble opinion, it is a classic example of purportedly “new wine” that should not be put into “old wine skins” (Mark 2:22). However, nothing here is new! It claims to be an exercise in Analytic Theology informed by 20<sup>th</sup> Century Analytic Philosophy and indirectly invokes Habermas’ confession that he is among those with a “religiously unmusical ear” – to wit: this is compatible with Frankfurt “Critical Theory” (Habermas, *Glauben und Wissen* [Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2001]: 30).

In fact, it is a classic model of anthropomorphic Voluntarist Theology (found in the West in Duns Scotus [1206-1308] and much earlier in Islamic theology with Hamid al-Ghazali [1058-1111]) that in the film portrays God employing the laws of nature to communicate His (!) non-natural “will” and purpose above and through nature. Voluntarist Theology is anthropomorphic because it makes a claim about what/who God is on the basis of an analogy to human creative agency. This human analogy is shared with Intellectualist Theology but emphasizes will over Intellectualist Theology’s emphasis upon rational order. Rather than view agency as a double- phased creative process as does Intellectualist Theology (first phase: the Thinker thinks His eternal, rational order [Logos]; second phase: the Thinker gathers together the material elements and follows the rational sequence for generating His artifacts), the anthropomorphic analogy of Voluntarist Theology places “will” above the rational order because it is presumed that, temporally, the desire to do something precedes thought. Because God is by definition infinitely perfect, anything that He wills is good so that He can violate His own rational order to achieve His “good” ends. Both human analogies appear to be correct for humanity, but they are highly speculative when it comes to a claim for God’s creative agency. It is enough to observe, as did David Hume in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1982) not only does such an analogy constitute the highest peak of hubris that the universe is organized and created by a mind just like ours (14-17, 88) but also we have never experienced in nature an example where matter is

generated directly by mind. On the contrary, mind occurs in our experience as preceded by “generation”, vegetable growth (47) – even should we conclude that it is not reducible to matter.

Voluntarist Theology undermines what Kant in the final, methodological section of the *Critique of Pure Reason* calls the “architectonic” of reason that points out that all forms of causality that we can grasp from within the limits of reason must necessarily (not in the sense of blind determination of, but as a requirement for) fit into a coherent, single order, otherwise there is no possibility of understanding. Speculative belief in a form of causality outside and independent of the architectonic of reason is possible, of course, but incapable of proof/disproof because we only experience the effects of causality (not causes directly). Such a belief in a capricious causality that can violate the rational, lawful orders of experience makes all understanding and responsible agency impossible – unless, of course, God is taken to be the ultimate author of our understanding, which reduces us to automatons, victims of a vicious hermeneutical circle that requires divine grace to understand grace!

The principle of this absolute will’s control over nature is that the absolute will can violate even natural laws to achieve its ends, but the film conveniently skips that implication because it would mean that God has the capacity to perform “miracles” and would, then, correctly alarm the natural sciences as well as anyone committed to coherent understanding. What is important to the film’s Analytic Theology is that God is more than the Noumenal “X” of origin for the universe along with the universe’s two lawful domains of nature (theoretical reason) and freedom (practical reason) because “No one can pray to an ‘origin’”, the film asserts. Really? Perhaps if prayer only means an “instrumental” prayer of “economic exchange”.

The film has no sense of Kant’s notion of *a priori* synthetic judgment, reduces religion to Christianity by constantly using exclusively (with the exception of a Buddha statue in the opening yoga scene) the symbol of the Christian cross, conveniently limits religious claims down to belief in God and the afterlife with no engagement of the Christian doctrine of salvation, and, most importantly, turns theology exclusively into an exercise in theoretical reason (understanding) without any mentioning of practical reason (morality).

In short, the film is a defense of mythology. What is mythological about it? Ernst Cassirer distinguishes between the “perceptual structure” and “conceptual structure” of mythology in his *Essay on Man* (Yale, 1977): 76. For want of space, I will not discuss the “conceptual structure”. The former, the perceptual structure, takes the natural world to be the “face” of the gods/God analogous to the “face” of a parent for a small child (see Vol. 12 of Cassirer’s *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, Band II: *Das mythische Denken*: 214-215, 239-241, and, especially, Vol. 13, Band III: *Phänomenologie der Erkenntnis*: 71-83, 123). The child takes the natural world’s purpose to be the sustaining and caring for its well-being. It “reads” the face to try to figure out the “mood” of the parent. This is exactly how the film portrays the way God interacts with the world: through appearances that, especially, are unusual and strange (i.e., capricious). Humanity, changing the metaphor, is called to “read the tea leaves”.

In the film, God is presented as part of the *imperceptible* dimension of experience silently assuming, but with no discussion of, the *imperceptible, a priori* elements that constitute humanity’s ability to experience, understand, and exercise responsible agency, in the first place!

The goal of the film is to justify belief in God. It nowhere addresses the “issue at issue” with causal explanation: we only experience effects; we never experience causes directly. The limits to reason are what allow for the creation of multiple causal explanations for the same event – but by no means justifies any and every capricious “constructivist” account of causality in the false belief that our understanding is the actual creation of the cause that we’re trying to understand. In point of fact, the easiest thing for us to do is to formulate a causal explanation because there is no way to prove that we are right or wrong. The film illustrates this brilliantly but fails to grasp the consequences. Its strategy is: if it is possible to believe, then you can believe it! The speculative doors to the barn are thrown wide open to anti-science religion, the Putin-Virus that “everyone’s doing ‘it ‘so one can unhesitatingly pursue one’s self-interest without holding oneself morally accountable”, the elimination of morality by relativizing moral principles to community constructions to guide successful negotiation of a particular social world (which allows every drug cartel and Mafia clan to claim that they are moral), and religion is reduced to wishful thinking – to be sure, well intended wishful thinking but, nonetheless, **self-interested** wishful thinking.

The film attempt to ground religion an epistemic belief system it proposes (epistemic here = knowledge acquired beyond the limits of reason) whose concern, ultimately, is with **meaning and purpose** in life rather than religion being concerned with the conditions for any and all experience, understanding, and responsible agency. The dogmatic claim is that without this “analytic” God there is no meaning and purpose in the universe. This is ridiculous gibberish meant only to serve personal, self-interest – ultimately, the egocentric personal self-interest of the preservation of one’s “soul” in the next life.

Enjoy!

Doug